



Hope for the Future

The Dalai Lama

I WANT TO SPEAK with you about the importance of kindness and compassion. When I speak about this, I regard myself not as a Buddhist, not as the Dalai Lama, not even as a Tibetan, but as one human being, and I hope that you will think of yourself as a human being rather than just an American, or a Westerner, or a member of a particular group. These things are secondary. If you and I interact as human beings, we can reach this basic level. If I say, "I am a monk; I am a Buddhist," these are, in comparison to my nature as a human being, temporary. To be human is basic. Once you are born as a human being, that cannot change until your death. Other characteristics—whether you are educated or uneducated, rich or poor—are secondary.

Today we face many problems. Some are essentially created by ourselves, based on divisions due to ideology, religion, race, economic status, and other factors. Because of this, the time has come for us to think on a deeper level, on the human being level, and from that level to respect and appreciate the sameness of ourselves and others as human beings. We must build closer relationships of mutual trust, understanding, respect, and help, regardless of differences in culture, philosophy, religion, or faith.

After all, all human beings are made of flesh, bones, and blood, wanting happiness, and not wanting suffering. We all have an equal right to be happy, and it is important to realize our sameness as human beings. We all belong to one human family. We quarrel with each other, but that is due to secondary reasons, and all of this arguing, cheating and suppressing each other is of no use.

Unfortunately, for many centuries, human beings have used all sorts of methods to suppress and hurt one another. Terrible things have been done. We have caused more problems, more suffering, and more mistrust, and created more hatred and more divisions.

Today the world is becoming smaller and smaller. Economically and from many other viewpoints, the different areas of the world are becoming closer and much more interdependent. Because of this, international summits often take place; problems in one remote place are connected with global crises. The situation itself expresses the fact that it is now necessary to think more on a human level rather than on the basis of the matters which divide us. Therefore, I am speaking to you as just a human being, and I earnestly hope that you are also reading with the thought, "I am a human being, and I am here reading the words of another human being."

All of us want happiness. In cities, on farms, even in remote villages, everyone is quite busy. What is the purpose? Everyone is trying to create happiness. To do so is right. However, it is very important to follow a correct method in seeking happiness. Too much involvement with superficialities will not solve the larger problems.

There are all about us many crises, many fears. Through highly developed science and technology, we have reached a very advanced level of material progress, both useful and necessary. Yet if you compare the external progress with our internal progress, it is quite clear that our internal progress falls short. In many countries, crises—terrorism, murders, and so on—are chronic. People complain about the decline in morality and the rise in criminal activity. Although in external matters we are highly developed and continue to progress, at the same time we neglect our inner development.

In ancient times, if there was war, the effect was limited. Today, because of external material progress, the potential for destruction is beyond imagination. When I visited Hiroshima, though I knew something about the nuclear explosion there, I found it very difficult to see it with my own eyes and to meet with people who actually suffered at the moment of the bombing. I was deeply moved. A terrible weapon was used. Though we might regard someone as an enemy, on a deeper level an enemy is also a human being, also wants happiness, also has the right to be happy. Looking at Hiroshima and thinking at that moment I became even more convinced that anger and hatred cannot solve problems.

Anger cannot be overcome by anger. If a person shows anger to you and you respond with anger, the result is a disaster. In contrast, if you control anger and show the opposite attitude—compassion, tolerance, patience—then not only do you yourself remain in peace, but the other person's anger will gradually diminish. World problems also cannot be challenged by anger or hatred. They must be faced with compassion, love, and true kindness. Even with all the terrible weapons we have, the weapons themselves cannot start a war. The button to trigger them is under a human finger, which moves by thought, not under its own power. The responsibility rests in thought.

If you look deeply into such things, the blueprint is found within—in the mind—out of which actions come. Thus, first controlling the mind is very important. I am not talking about controlling the mind in the sense of deep meditation, but rather in the sense of cultivating less anger, more respect for others' rights, more concern for other people, more clear realization of the sameness of human beings. This attitude may not solve problems immediately, but we have to try. We have to begin promoting this understanding through magazines and through television. Rather than just advertising to make money for ourselves, we need to use these media for something more meaningful, more seriously directed towards the welfare of humankind. Not money alone. Money is necessary, but the actual purpose of money is for human beings. Sometimes we forget human beings and become concerned just about money. This is illogical.

After all, we all want happiness, and no one will disagree with the fact that with anger, peace is impossible. With kindness and love, peace of mind can be achieved. No one wants mental unrest, but because of ignorance, depression and so on, these things occur. Bad attitudes arise from the power of ignorance, not of their own accord.

Through anger we lose one of the best human qualities—the power of judgment. We have a good brain, allowing us to judge what is right and what is wrong, not only in terms of today's concerns, but considering ten, twenty, or even a hundred years into the future. Without any precognition, we can use our normal common sense to determine if something is right or wrong. We can decide that if we do such and such, it will lead to such and such an effect. However, once our mind is occupied by anger, we lose this power of judgment. Once lost, it is very sad—physically you are a human being but mentally you are not complete. Given that we have this physical human form, we must safeguard our mental capacity of judgment. For that, we cannot take out insurance. The insurance company is within ourselves: self-discipline, self-awareness, and clear realization of the shortcomings of anger and the positive effects of kindness. Thinking about this again and again, we can become convinced of it; and then with self-awareness, we can control the mind.

For instance, at present you may be a person who, due to small things, gets quickly and easily irritated. With clear understanding and awareness, that can be controlled. If you usually remain angry about ten minutes, try to reduce it to eight minutes. Next week make it five minutes and next month two minutes. Then make it zero. This is the way to develop and train our minds.

This is my feeling and also the sort of practice I myself do. It is quite clear that everyone needs peace of mind; the question is how to achieve it. Through anger we cannot. Through kindness, through love, through compassion, we can achieve peace of mind. The result will be a peaceful family—happiness between parents and children; fewer quarrels between husband and wife; no worries about divorce. Extended to the national level, this attitude can bring unity, harmony, and cooperation with genuine motivation. On the international level, mutual trust, mutual respect, and friendly and frank discussions can lead to joint efforts to solve world problems. All these are possible.

But first we must change within ourselves. Our national leaders try their best to solve our problems, but when one problem is solved, another crops up. Trying to solve that, there is another somewhere else. The time has come to try a different approach. Of course, it is very difficult to achieve a worldwide movement of peace of mind, but it is the only alternative. If there were an easier and more practical method, that would be better, but there is none. If through weapons we could achieve real, lasting peace, all right. Let all factories be turned into weapons factories. Spend every dollar for that, if that will achieve definite, lasting peace. But it is impossible.

Weapons do not remain stockpiled. Once a weapon is developed, sooner or later someone will use it. Someone might feel that if we do not use it, millions of dollars will be wasted, so somehow we should use it—drop a bomb to try it out. The result is that innocent people get

killed. A friend told me that in Beirut there is a businessman who deals in weapons solely to make money. Because of him, many poor people in the streets get killed—ten or fifteen, or a hundred every day. This is due to lack of human understanding, lack of mutual respect and trust, not acting on a basis of kindness and love.

Therefore, although attempting to bring about peace through internal transformation is difficult, it is the only way to achieve a lasting world peace. Even if it is not achieved during my own lifetime, that is all right. More human beings will come—the next generation and the one after that—and progress can continue. I feel that despite the practical difficulties and the fact that this is regarded as an unrealistic view, it is worthwhile to make the attempt. So wherever I go, I express this, and I am encouraged that people from many different walks of life receive it well.

Each of us has responsibility for all humankind. It is time for us to think of other people as true brothers and sisters and to be concerned with their welfare, with lessening their suffering. Even if you cannot sacrifice your own benefit entirely, you should not forget the concerns of others. We should think more about the future and the benefit of all humanity.

If you try to subdue your selfish motives—anger, and so forth—and develop more kindness, more compassion for others, ultimately you will benefit more than you would otherwise. So sometimes I say that the wise selfish person should practice this way. Foolish selfish persons always think of themselves, and the results are negative. But a wise, selfish person thinks of others, helps others as much as he or she can, and receives good results.

This is my simple religion. There is no need for complicated philosophies, not even for temples. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple. The philosophy is kindness.

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The Dalai Lama. "Hope for the Future," in *Engaged Buddhist Reader*, Arnold Kotler, ed. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1996. 248-252.

Photo: HH the Dalai Lama at Kilauea Volcano, October 1980 photo by Chiu Leong.